

## American Library Association

### National Impact of Library Public Program Assessment: Phase I

As U.S. libraries transform themselves to meet the needs of a changing nation, public programming is rising to the forefront of their daily operations. Public libraries offered 4.3 million programs in 2013<sup>1</sup>, and that number has increased an average of 5.9 percent per year over the past three years<sup>2</sup>. No longer are libraries merely lenders and collection-holders; they are centers of lifelong experiential learning, civic and cultural hubs, and gathering places for discussion and innovation. However, little national data is available to quantify this work. To better understand this transformation and prepare library professionals to embrace their changing role, we must assess the programming currently being offered by our nation's libraries and determine how certain skills and training will prepare current and future library professionals to embrace the profession's changing role.

The American Library Association (ALA) Public Programs Office (PPO) requests \$489,610 in IMLS National Leadership funding for a two-year research project titled *National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment: Phase I*. This funding will allow ALA to implement the first phase of a comprehensive research strategy to understand and document the characteristics, audiences, outcomes, and value of the nation's library public programming. This phase will explore:

1. *Program typologies: the types of programs being offered by libraries, and their characteristics*
2. *Library programming competencies: the current knowledge, skills, and training required for professional library programming providers*

This project will gather information from across the range of program types, topics, formats, audiences, and partners to build an information matrix that aligns impacts, program types, audiences, and other variables. Leveraging PLA's Project Outcome data, this work will build upon results from the IMLS National Leadership planning grant<sup>3</sup>, which determined that libraries need support, guidance, and comparison data to support their public programmers. This project will lay the groundwork for serving the emerging needs of library workers and provide foundations for ongoing measurement and tracking of how programming is impacting library services and users.

#### Work Plan:

Question 1: Program Typologies. This descriptive study will characterize the range of library public programming by type, developing a metadata coding strategy that can characterize content type, delivery technique, library patron profile, and possible program sponsor relationships. It will further define the role of the programming professional in design, development, and facilitation of the program, and align information to existing ALA research. The study will employ a sequential quantitative/qualitative, two-phase, mixed-methods data collection strategy.

- Data Analysis: Using PLA Project Outcome's inventory of program types, the research team will develop a taxonomy by service populations, delivery strategies, techniques, library profiles, and community descriptors using an emergent coding scheme. These results will be distributed for peer-review to the advisory panel prior to verification in the next phase.
- Grounding Findings in Practice: A survey distributed to 4,000 individuals from ALA's Programming Librarian database will test the validity of the taxonomy by inviting practitioners from academic, school,

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<sup>1</sup> IMLS Public Libraries in the United States Survey: Fiscal Year 2013, March 2016

<sup>2</sup> PLA 2015 PLDS Statistical Report

<sup>3</sup> American Library Association. (2014). National impact of library public program assessment white paper. Retrieved from [http://www.newknowledge.org/nlppa/wp-content/uploads/2014/NILPPA\\_White\\_Paper\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.newknowledge.org/nlppa/wp-content/uploads/2014/NILPPA_White_Paper_FINAL_web.pdf)

public, and special libraries to review the findings. The practitioners will supplement the taxonomy with descriptions of the depth and range of their own programs, clarify categories and codes for consistency across sites, describe program support strategies, and define common terms for the field.

**Question 2: Library Programming Competencies.** This mixed-methods research effort will develop community-wide definitions for core competencies necessary to be a library programming professional (e.g., degrees, training, certifications, aptitudes, expectations, and mid-career professional development). By working with academic programs, program practitioners, and administrators, the NILPPA team will describe current practices, desired competencies, and challenges facing the field.

- **Studying the Field.** In Y1 and Y2, researchers will collect and analyze curriculum offerings and syllabi from MLIS programs and solicit feedback from professionals on non-MLIS learning that helped prepare them for the field. Simultaneously, we will deploy three parallel online surveys to library administrators, academic instructors, and practitioners on current needs, followed by a discussion forum at ALA's 2018 Midwinter Meeting and 2018 Annual Conference. A draft white paper will be released for public feedback (Y2/Q3).
- **Community Consensus:** During the first half of Y2, the team will host a series of online, field-wide discussion forums to assess the white paper recommendations. Beginning Y2/Q2, the competencies document will be shared for feedback with academic program administrators and library administrators. The final white paper will outline components of effective library programming, strategies for benchmarking in the national context, and professional training and tools needed to meet the needs of future program users.

**Key Personnel:** ALA staff, led by PPO Deputy Director Mary Davis Fournier, continues its relationship with research partner NewKnowledge, a think tank with library field experience (including support for PLA's Project Outcome). Four established library researchers — Jennifer Weil Arns (Univ. of SC), Michele Besant (UW-Madison), Janine Golden (USC), and Jaimie C. Naidoo (Univ. of Alabama) — will participate in the research team. Additional advisors from across the field will be convened in person and via quarterly calls<sup>4</sup>.

**Outcomes:** This research will develop a snapshot of library public programming, its impacts, and those competencies that must be enhanced if libraries expect to continue to excel in this work. The findings will serve as a companion to PLA's Project Outcome and other leadership training efforts in all sectors of the field. At the conclusion of this project, researchers will possess: (1) primary data to inform national assessment of how programming is changing and responding to community needs; (2) a codified understanding of how public programming is situated as part of library services in communities; (3) data to demonstrate how all types of libraries can deliver relevant, effective, and comprehensive services through their public programming; and (4) knowledge to help professionals be more targeted in their career advancement.

**Budget:** The IMLS request of \$489,610 includes grant-funded staff salaries (\$98,539), travel (\$24,203), supplies, materials, and equipment (\$9,636), advisor honoraria (\$7,200), subcontractor fees (\$240,931), communication and distribution (\$15,000), and meeting costs (\$5,400).

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<sup>4</sup> Advisors who have agreed to participate include: Donna Brice, (ARSL), Terrilyn Chun (Multnomah Co. Library), Susan Feller (ALTAM), John<sup>4</sup> Horrigan (Pew Research Ctr.), Robert Horton (Smithsonian National Museum of American History), Colleen Leddy (Stair Public Library, Morenci, MI), Amita Kaur Lonial (Skokie Public Library, IL), Anne Norman (Delaware State Library), Manju Prasad-Rao (Long Island Univ. Instructional Media Center), Marsha Semmel (Marsha Semmel Consulting), Ken Stewart (Blue Valley High School, Stillwell, KS), Rebecca Teasdale (Rebecca Teasdale Consulting), Sarah Goodwin Thiel (Univ. of Kansas, Watson Library), and Angel Ysaguirre (Illinois Humanities Council).